

Dorset South & West. Written Service.

Christmas Day.

Hear the Angels sing.

Prepared by Revd Jean Quick.



Call to Worship. John 1:14 The Word Became Flesh

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Opening liturgy

Light in our darkness, joy in our sorrow, Our Saviour is born, the Prince of Peace,

The King of all, Emmanuel, God with us.

Let's share the song, With angels let us sing.

Glory to God, revealed among us, Given for us, offered for us, Living within, one with us.

Let's share the song, With angels let us sing.

The day is here, the time is now. Promised long ago and promised still. Within the laughter and the chat,

Let's share the song, With angels let us sing.

STF 195

Christians, awake, salute the happy morn
whereon the Saviour of the world was born;
rise to adore the mystery of love,
which hosts of angels chanted from above;
with them the joyful tidings first begun
of God incarnate and the Virgin's Son.

To Beth'lem straight the enlightened shepherds ran,
to see, unfolding, God's eternal plan;
then to their flocks, still praising God, return,
and their glad hearts with holy rapture burn;
amazed, the wondrous tidings they proclaim,
the first apostles of his infant fame.

Then to the watchful shepherds it was told,
who heard the angelic herald's voice, 'Behold,
I bring good tidings of a Saviour's birth
to you and all the nations upon earth;
this day has God fulfilled his promised word,
this day is born a Saviour, Christ the Lord.'

Like Mary, let us ponder in our mind
God's wondrous love in saving humankind;
trace we the Babe, who has retrieved our loss,
from his poor manger to his bitter cross;
treading his steps, assisted by his grace,
till our first heavenly state again takes place.

He spoke; and straightway the celestial choir
in hymns of joy, unknown before, conspire.
The praises of redeeming love they sang,
and heaven's whole orb with alleluias rang;
God's highest glory was their anthem still,
peace on the earth, in every heart goodwill.

Then may we hope, the angelic hosts among,
to sing, redeemed, a glad triumphal song;
he who was born upon this joyful day
around us all his glory shall display;
saved by his love, incessant we shall sing
eternal praise to heaven's almighty King.

Prayers of adoration and confession: A Christmas Prayer by Robert Louis Stevenson

Loving Father, Help us remember the birth of Jesus, that we may share in the song of the angels, the gladness of the shepherds, and worship of the wise men.

Close the door of hate and open the door of love all over the world. Let kindness come with every gift and good desires with every greeting. Deliver us from evil by the blessing which Christ brings, and teach us to be joyful with clear hearts.

May the Christmas morning make us happy to be your children, and Christmas evening bring us to our beds with grateful thoughts, forgiving and forgiven, for Jesus' sake. **Amen.**

The Gospel Reading. Luke 2:1-20. The Birth of Jesus

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world.

(This was the first census that took place which Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.

Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.” When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.” So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

STF 205

It came upon the midnight clear,
that glorious song of old,
from angels bending near the earth
to touch their harps of gold:
'Peace on the earth, good will to men,
from heaven's all-gracious King!'
The world in solemn stillness lay
to hear the angels sing.

Still through the cloven skies they come,
with peaceful wings unfurled;
and still their heavenly music floats
o'er all the weary world;
above its sad and lowly plains
they bend on hovering wing;
and ever o'er its Babel sounds
the blessed angels sing.

Yet with the woes of sin and strife
the world has suffered long;
beneath the angel strain have rolled
two thousand years of wrong;
and man, at war with man, hears not
the love-song which they bring.
O hush the noise, ye men of strife,
and hear the angels sing!

For lo, the days are hastening on,
to prophets shown of old,
when with the ever-circling years
shall come the time foretold,
when the new heaven and earth shall own
the Prince of Peace their King,
and all the world repeat the song
which now the angels sing.

Reflection

'Christmas is loud, isn't it? So much expectation. So many voices. Telling us how to celebrate, what to wear, what to eat and drink, what to watch and what to buy.'
Instead, through the Advent and Christmas resources we have been following, this Christmas we're invited to hush the noise. To listen for the love song that the angels bring this and every year. They sang it for the first time more than 2,000 years ago, on the midnight clear.

I wonder if there is something trivial you wish you could have done and you realise you don't have the ability or energy or resources to do it now? I would love to have laid down in deep snow and made a snow angel! You are permitted to laugh, it's Christmas day!

A snow angel is a design, made in fresh snow, by lying on one's back and moving one's arms up and down, and one's legs from side to side, to form the shape of an angel. When you are young you don't worry about slipping on the winter's icy conditions or getting good clothes wet or damaged! I wonder who first discovered the idea of making snow angels? Angels have always held a special place in people's hearts and today we rejoice with the angels that they proclaimed Christ Jesus' birth.



Angels are mentioned 296 times in the Bible but only two are mentioned by name Michael (15 times) and Gabriel (9 times). There are different types of angels too. Cherubim's and Seraphim to name just two of these special messenger's and guardians. Angels are not the subject of worship but direct our worship to God.

On this wonderful day we recall that the he shepherds 'repeat the song' that they have heard from the angels to Mary and Joseph. There was new information here; Mary and Joseph already knew that the child would be the Messiah (Luke 1:32-35) and Lord (Luke 1:43) but from the shepherds they learn that the child will also be a saviour.

When you consider who heard the angels song it wasn't the privileged who had managed to get a decent bed in the inn. Or those in high places who had created this massive upheaval by ordering people to return to their homeland in order to conduct a census! Which doesn't bear thinking about. We perhaps find it irksome

to complete the census when it comes around but at least it is done from the comfort of our own homes. We don't have to travel to where we were born! However it wasn't the all powerful Emperor and his minion's who heard the angels song. Indeed it was those who were almost outcast by society.

One wonders about the noise that the angels had to break through to make their message known? For the shepherds we imagine a quieter scene. Sitting around the fire, listening to the noises of the night and the flocks usual sounds. Alert and focused on anything unusual that might mean danger and call them to action to protect the sheep. One wonders what the appearance would actually have been like? Enough to terrify these brave lowly men. First one Angel giving them a message that must have been challenging and yet good news. We speculate that they might have been discussing how the occupation was affecting their lives and now a shining messenger scares the life out of them and tells them a baby has been born who will be their salvation! So from a conquering Caesar Augustus of Rome in his palace, salvation is to come from a lowly baby born in a stable, not even qualified to have a birth in a room in the inn. Then not just a little choir but a whole multitude joined the angel to sing praises to God! Now that has to be some sound level and the kind of noise you never want to hush. The sound and words that excite you and call you into action.

The other scene that we have in our gospel is of course the stable. A quiet place? I can't imagine it! Child birth is it ever a serene peaceful event! One can imagine Mary in the pangs of labour just wishing that the cattle would hush their noise for a moment and let her get on with the birth! No doubt someone would have been there to assist with the birth and so there would have been others telling her what to do and giving advice and guidance. Then one imagines that after the child is born, any mother would want to rest in peace and quiet after the exhaustion of childbirth. However a group of shepherds arrive and there must have been others present because we are told, 'and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them.' In the stable you have the physical noise of the people and the animals and the angels. Plus the internal noise of what this message means. The fact that all the oppression of life lived under the occupation, the hardships and difficulties are going to be relieved. The prophecy of Isaiah 9 fulfilled.

"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness" a light has dawned." "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this."

Wow imagine hearing those words with the cacophony of noise internally and around you? A message you would want to shout from the roof tops! I guess the nearest we can get to even a hint of it's meaning would be for someone so down on their luck to be told that they had inherited a fortune! Which when we consider what the best gift given on this day might be?.... It's just that! We who struggle with all the difficulties and disharmony of life have a Saviour who is born for all? No that's not what the scripture says! A saviour **to you** is born this day . It's that personal and yes for all people whoever they are.

What was Mary's response? 'and Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.' This could be a noisy day and a noisy time of year. I wonder if you could find a moment to hush the noise and ponder over the truth of this special day and treasure it's worth to you personally?

I guess many will be glibly saying of others and yet truly meant ! "Oh! You are an angel!". To the teenager who helps with the extra dishes today, or someone who notices that you have dropped your reading glasses and passed them to you, and many other examples of how we use those words, "Oh! You are an angel"

Now in conclusion, let's think of something we wish we could have done that would be anything but trivial and that we still do have the ability, the energy and the resources to do now? Something that might make people think that we are being an angel to them? But, let's lift it up a notch, and make it something that makes them think of the love of God born in us today and not about us. Remember when the angels gave their life changing message they didn't hang around waiting for a sign of gratitude. They immediately left and returned to the Father in Heaven. To paraphrase the scriptures. So as we seek to hush the noise of the joyful celebration of this day, let us find a way to make known by our words and deeds that wonderful message that the angels sang.

Prayers of Intercession

Loving God, on this joyous day of celebration we pray for those of us who find it difficult to join in the celebration. We pray for the lonely and the bereaved. We pray for those who are grieving, bring comfort to all who mourn.

God who heals. We pray for those who are ill and in pain. We ask you to bring relief and comfort. We pray for any known especially to us who need our prayers. Ease their suffering and remind them that you never leave us alone.

God of justice. We pray for those for whom life is a struggle. We pray for those who are feeling life is hopeless. We think of those who are in places of danger and conflict. Where the battles never seem to end and the destruction and suffering continues. Jesus Christ, who became a refugee, be with those who fear for their lives, and those who have left homes and families this Christmas. Thank you for the angels' song of love and joy and peace. We pray that your peace will bring an end to warfare and violence.

Jesus Christ, born in a stable, Be with the poor and homeless this Christmas time. We long for the day when food banks will not be required. A time when everyone will have enough to provide for themselves and their families. We long for the time when everyone will have a place of safety and warmth a place to call home. We thank you for the numerous organisations and volunteers trying to bring some relief in this time of economic crisis.

Jesus Christ, visited by Shepherds, Be with all who have to work this Christmastime. We thank you for the numerous individuals often unseen, who provide for our safety and wellbeing. The people who make our daily living possible and who are there for us in an emergency. We thank you for them and pray for your blessing upon them as they continue to serve our needs.

We unite our prayers in the Lord's Prayer.

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O come, all ye faithful,
joyful and triumphant,
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem;
come and behold him,
born the King of angels:

*O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
Christ the Lord!*

True God of true God,
Light of Light eternal,
Lo, he abhors not the Virgin's womb;
Son of the Father,
begotten, not created:

See how the shepherds,
summoned to his cradle,
leaving their flocks, draw nigh to gaze;

we too will thither
bend our joyful footsteps:

Lo, star-led chieftains,
Magi, Christ adoring,
offer him incense, gold, and myrrh;
we to the Christ-child
bring our hearts' oblations:

Sing, choirs of angels,
sing in exultation,
sing, all ye citizens of heaven above:
'Glory to God
in the highest:'

Yea, Lord, we greet thee,
born this happy morning,
Jesus, to thee be glory given:
Word of the Father,
now in flesh appearing:

The Blessing

May the joy of the angels, the eagerness of the shepherds, the perseverance of the wise men, the obedience of Joseph and Mary, and the peace of the Christ child be yours this Christmas. And the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**



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